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REV. DANIEL P. BESTOR, D.D.

Henderson, Samuel
Sketch of Rev. Daniel P
Bestor, DD

Palm Beach

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theological, literary, and historical
 aspects of the Bible.

1911

1911

OUR WORTHY DEAD.

SKETCH BY DR. SAM'L HENDERSON

APRIL, 20th, 1882.

REV. DANIEL P. BESTOR, D. D.

I doubt not that every minister can recur back to his earlier years, that formative period in his own life, when he met some preacher who came up to his ideal of that sacred calling—whose matter, style and delivery—whose talents, culture and piety—whose deportment, manners and attractiveness—made him just what he thought every minister ought to be. And such was my estimate of the Rev. Daniel P. Bestor when first I met him, just as I had completed my teens, in the year 1837, at the Wewokee campmeeting in the fall of that year, when he came to deliver a memorial sermon for the lamented Judge Lawler, as I have already mentioned in my sketch of that justly distinguished man. Mr. Bestor was then in the prime of life, and was at the head of one of the largest female seminaries in the State, at Greensboro. In his person he was slightly below the average height, but in symmetry the most perfect one ever sees. Indeed, his body was, so to express it, the exact counterpart of his mind. It seems as if the author of our spirits and the maker of our frames, intending to bestow so sparkling a jewel, encased it in a casket of faultless mould. Thinking of him at this distance of time as he was in those days of his broadest usefulness and power, I can only say that his whole *personnel* came nearer being an incarnation of pure intellection and refined and pious emotion than any man I ever saw.

Daniel Perrin Bestor was born February 2d, 1797, at Suffield, Conn.; removed to Kentucky when quite young, and was converted at Lexington, under the preaching of the celebrated Dr. Fishback, at the age of twenty-two, and commenced preaching at once, under Dr. Fishback's instruction. He had previously studied law, but abandoned it for his higher calling. Remaining in Lexington about two years after this, he settled in North Alabama, at Athens, and in 1825 married Miss Eliza J. Townes, the daughter of John Townes, a prominent lawyer and planter in Lawrence county, who himself subsequently became one of the most prominent and useful Baptist preachers in that part of the State. About the year 1833, he removed to Greensboro, Ala., and resided there thirteen years, and established a female seminary that became one of the most popular schools in the State. He used playfully to say, that the young men of Alabama owed him a vast debt of gratitude, for that he had educated nearly a thousand wives for them. Perhaps we never had in our State a man who excelled him in adaptability to such a work. To talents of the first order, he added a culture the most refined, and possessed withal administrative capacities such as fall to the lot of the fewest number of men. He was a kind of pioneer in this respect, and to him, more than to any other man, we owe that high standard of female education which has given to Alabama its noble type of womanhood, and of which the Judson Institute and the Central Female College, and we might add, the East Alabama Female College, before it was reduced to ashes, were the fruits.

In 1846, he removed to Sumter county, where he devoted his attention to farming and preaching for ten years. This was the period of his greatest usefulness. And I may as well add just here that with all those abilities that gave him such a breadth of influence in the State, and that made him the charm of every circle, he possessed that balance of mind we call common sense to that degree that made him a model in all the practicalities of life. He always maintained that the judgment, skill, industry and

economy which a minister displayed in managing his private affairs were a fair criterion by which to judge of his usefulness and success as a pastor. If he failed at home, he would fail elsewhere. While he believed as sincerely as any man that pastors ought to be supported by their churches, he always maintained that no obligations could ever be imposed by God or man upon any minister that would release him from the vows of the marriage altar, where he assumed the responsibilities of head of the family, and that to impoverish his family to preach to churches that would not pay, was a crime against humanity. In his estimation, the sublimest ministerial consecration is found in our country churches when Godly, zealous men worked six days in the week on their farms for the privilege of preaching on the seventh. For such men he always had a warm place in his heart, and an earnest "God bless you" in his greeting. Some of the most eloquent and touching tributes I ever heard from his lips were paid to these men.

In 1856, Mr. Bestor removed his property to Mississippi, and settled a plantation there, which he kept up until the war closed, but he resided in Mobile until the war broke out, when he retired to his farm and gave it his personal supervision until the surrender. On the restoration of peace, he took charge of the Baptist church in Columbus, Miss., where he remained until his death.

I have no means of knowing the number of churches he served as pastor during his long, laborious and useful life. The following are the most prominent: Athens, La-Grange, Greensboro, Spring Hill, Gainsville, Sumterville, Livingston and Mobile, in Alabama, and Columbus, in Mississippi. His ministerial labors were arduous and abundant, and were almost always without remuneration. He was blessed with a competency of this world's goods all through his life, and churches in those days were not in the habit of paying even their poorest pastors anything worthy the name of a salary. Being in independent circumstances himself, he would often, on proper occasions,

stir up the churches as to their duty to their pastors in a manner that they would not likely forget, and in this way did a vast amount of good for his ministerial brethren. I remember one of these occasions as if it were yesterday, though it has been over thirty years ago. He was showing that a minister's salary was an honest debt, as much so as the bill of a merchant, blacksmith, or any other, and that a failure to pay it was as dishonest as to repudiate any other honest debt—that pastors were not paupers to be fed by public charities, but gifts from Christ and employees of churches, whose right to their "wages" was a matter of divine ordination, to disregard which would be a palpable infraction of the law of Christ; and concluded by ringing out in his own inimitable style about these words: "I am not a beggar, brethren! I am not pleading for beggars! I am appealing to you for simple justice to the most deserving class of laborers that ever served you—laborers that do more for less money than any on which the sun shines. Charity indeed! I throw back the imputation! Not one dollar of that kind of money has ever entered this pocket," said he, "and never shall while I have a brain to think or hands to labor."

In those days, I can scarcely think how the Baptist Convention of Alabama could have been what it was without Bestor and Devotie. They were in many respects the counterparts of each other. Personally devoted to one another, there was just those differences in their temperament and mental characteristics, that made the occasions of their meeting in our conventions and associations sources of the most lively interest to their brethren. Propositions would come up for discussion that would put each of them upon his highest mettle, and it would be "Greek meeting Greek," not in hostile array, but in that broad range of debate, that genial, spicy repartee, that courteous, ingenuous, manly spirit, that never degenerated into the slightest animosity. I can recall some of these occasions with a vividness as if they had been but yesterday, in which we were treated with some of the finest ex-

temporized speaking to which I have ever listened anywhere. If I were to contrast, or rather compare these two men, I should say that Devotie's style was the more impassioned, Bestor's the more brilliant—the one was more aggressive and bold, the other the more cautious—the one was sanguine of success, the other was concerned to prevent a failure—the one had unbounded confidence in his brethren, the other measured his confidence by results—the one, committed fully to a given cause, never paused to calculate the counterpois of opposition to overcome, the other, while not the less earnest, always marshalled his resources wisely for every emergency;—Devotie embodied the loftiest courage with the sublimest faith, Bestor combined the acutest sagacity with the most fertile resources—in a word, the one was the incarnation of Godly enthusiasm, the other was common sense organized and set on fire; and both possessed all these attributes in common to such a degree as to lay the foundation for a life-long sanctified friendship; for in the above comparison, I have only indicated what appears to me as the salient points in each of these noble men. Bestor has gone to his reward; Devotie is yet spared, thank God, and is now giving, in our neighboring State, Georgia, to the cause of his Master, as effective a service as he ever performed in the full strength of his manhood. He still lives in the affections of his Alabama brethren, as among the happiest recollections of by-gone days.

Dr. Bestor was for sometime a member of the legislatures of Alabama and Mississippi. While connected with the Alabama Legislature he distinguished himself for the high stand he took on popular education. For many years he was one of the trustees of our State University, during the presidency of the late Dr. Manly. This brought him into the most intimate relations with Dr. M., as well as with the leading men of the State. He was devoted to the interests of the University, and always cherished the highest respect and veneration for its distinguished President. He often spoke of Dr. Manly as the wisest man and

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ablest minister he had ever met. In the intimacy and tenderness of their friendship for each other, we were often reminded of David and Jonathan. The massive intellect and mellow piety of Dr. Manly, and the broad culture and elevated and refined sensibility of Dr. Bestor, furnished the basis for the happiest social and Christian relations known on earth. By a singular coincidence in God's providence, they both died within a few months of each other, and of the same disease, and are now united in a higher and holier service than they ever rendered in this world, and their names are now associated in our minds with our sweetest conceptions of heaven.

As an indication of how Dr. Bestor was esteemed by those who knew him best, he was frequently elected to the presidencies of colleges and high schools, but declined them. He also had frequent calls to Northern churches, some of them quite tempting and desirable; but his attachment to the land of his choice was ardent and sincere, and he never could consent to leave it. No man ever lived among us who loved the "Sunny South" more ardently than he.

SKETCH BY DR. E. B. TEAGUE,

JUNE, 1897.

REV. D. P. BESTOR, D. D.

Mr. Bestor, as he was always called till late in life, came from Connecticut while almost a boy, and taught a flourishing school at Bowling Green, Kentucky. Soon, a marked subject of converting grace, he began to preach before he reached his majority, with an impression very much like Spurgeon, presently coming to Nashville and Huntsville, as he told me, he tried to persuade them to furnish him a bare support that he might give himself wholly to the ministry, "but they wouldn't do it." He therefore decided he would remain a single man, and if, indulging the passion of his soul, he suffered like Paul, it would be no injustice to anybody. But, thrown in his evangelistical work with Major Townes, an active minister and wealthy Virginia planter who had settled in North Alabama—having derived his title from service in Jackson's war—he very naturally was sometimes invited to the home of the latter; and becoming acquainted with his daughters was interested in them; so that one day when parting with one of them, as he let go her hand, he said, "you can have me for a husband if you will." She became the mother of his children. Repeating this matter to me many years after, he said "A pretty woman will play the mischief with a man's philosophy." Soon he established a Female School at LaGrange, maintained successfully for a number of years. Meanwhile, he was very active in the ministry, preaching all over the Tennessee Valley, and baptizing large numbers, sometimes by his own authority as a minister, who, when criticised, replied in the language of Vardeman of Kentucky, "I have a right

to mark my Master's sheep wherever I find them." His theology, as he told me, was, in those days, extremely Calvinistic: he used to preach "eternal justification," or as he put it that "the elect" were "virtually justified," from everlasting. Later his views were very much those of Andrew Fuller, some thought verging on Armenianism, but this I know was not true. Removing to Greensboro, Alabama, he conducted a famous Female School there for many years, and built up a strong and wealthy church. This last he did, for ten years, without money and without price. I suppose his brethren thought it was sufficient to patronize his school. He said in my pulpit at Clinton, Alabama, after retiring to his plantation in Mississippi, that for thirty years' preaching he had not received money enough to buy a handkerchief for himself or a penknife for his daughters. During this period he was often offered "paying" city pastorates, which meant a bare living in those days, but he did not see fit to subject his family to the usual straits of "settled pastors' families. Later in life he was no doubt well cared for in Mobile, Ala., and Columbus, Mississippi. This historico-biographic paragraph seemed necessary to the sketch following.

Mr. Bestor was a very accomplished *belles lettres* scholar, and extensively acquainted with science, especially natural history and entomology. He once said to me as we walked out in the summer time, "I know more about the birds and the bugs and the insects than any man in the country." I never knew any other man, as I thought, so perfectly adapted to fill the place of Principal in a Female Seminary. His person, manner, habits, were above criticism. Polished and refined to the utmost degree, his conversation overflowed with sparkling thought, brightest humor, and varied and boundless information. He called out all that was in a young lady, his public examinations becoming proverbially brilliant. His presence everywhere in the social circle was an ovation. In debate or repartee I never knew anyone to encounter him without coming off second best at most. I once nerved myself up,

as we rode in a buggy together, to remonstrate with him for mixing in politics as he did a good deal, frequently going to the legislature and indulging in speaking on the hustings. "Oh," he replied, "I am no priest: you and brother Clement are priests!" He was once dining with a brother Body in the "canebrake," quite a company being present. Suddenly dropping his fork and carver, the brother exclaimed, violently gesticulating with both hands, "Why don't you preach more, brother Bestor? If I had your talents, I would ride up and down all over the State and set it afire." "Very well, brother B," he responded, "I will make you a fair proposition. You ought to be as much concerned about the salvation of the people as I. I understand you have an income of twenty thousand dollars a year. Your family is about the size of mine. I know you can live comfortably on ten thousand. Just give me the other ten and I will give myself wholly to preaching."

In the presidential campaign when Gen. Scott was the Whig candidate, brother Bestor was appointed on the Scott electoral ticket, and in the course of the canvass got over into Lowndes county, Mississippi, and had spoken in Columbus Friday or Saturday, where he had delivered his famous series of discourses on the fulfillment of prophecy, and convinced several infidels; and where he could never pass without the people calling on him to preach. On this occasion, the large house, gallery and all, was filled to its utmost capacity. Just as the preacher rose, hymn book in hand, a messenger from "Gov. Whitfield" as he was called, having been such ex-officio for a time, as President of the Senate on the election of the Governor to the United States Senate, with much difficulty got through the crowded aisle to the pulpit, and beckoning to the preacher who stooped down to hear, whispered "Gov. Whitfield wishes me to say he honors you in your proper place; but cannot get his consent to hear a man preach on Sunday who has been dabbling in politics all the week." "Tell brother Whitfield there is no room in the house for him," replied the preacher, and proceeded as if nothing had happened. (Gov. Whitfield was a leading Democrat.)

Thus undistinguished in many things from men of other callings, free from the slightest tinge of cant, with a nature constitutionally rollicksome, and a keen relish of all the good things of this life, brother Bestor universally esteemed a good and honestly religious man, was not supposed by a good many to be specially devout. This was a mistake. In much intimate intercourse with him, for ten years, I never heard him utter a sentiment or indulge in an allusion that was not as pure as the virgin snow. He sometimes felt and manifested a just indignation. He yearned over fallen men; was profoundly reverential; uniformly talked of his Saviour with emotion; was tearfully tender in the pulpit; and manifested a forgiving spirit towards his critics and enemies. I have heard him say with choking emotion, "I wish God may forgive them as freely as I do."

Dr. Bestor's preaching was very fine; analytic, luminous, exhaustive, without an irrelevant sentence or word; logical, imaginative, illustrations most beautiful pouring in on his brain like a shower of stars. He was the most finished speaker of the hundred I have heard, whom I ever met. Voice, person, action, language, were perfect. Words flowed as easy as breathing. You were won, engaged, entranced often. A sensible man not much attracted by ordinary preachers, said when he heard Bestor, he was afraid to bat his eyes lest he should lose a word. In a word, I constantly think of Shakespeare's portrayal of man as a marvel in God's work when recalling Dr. Bestor's accomplishments: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in mien! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a God! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals."

Mobile Register
Nov 1907

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BESTOR MEMORIAL

Pioneer Baptist Minister Lauded At State Conference.

A resolution memorializing the late Rev. Daniel Perrin Bestor, pioneer Baptist preacher of Alabama, was passed by the Alabama Baptist convention at the final session of its annual meeting at the Dauphin Way Baptist church, yesterday.

The resolution, offered by Rev. W. E. Lockler, junior pastor of the First Baptist church, in connection with his report on memorials, follows:

"Whereas, from time immemorial it has been the custom of men to bestow honor upon those to whom honor is due; and,

"Whereas, we are now in session in a city under whose green velvety sod rests the mortal remains of one who so faithfully served the cause of Baptists in this state, a princely scholar, a matchless minister of Jesus Christ as well as a man of great faith; and,

"Whereas, we deem it our duty at all times to reverence the memory of our sainted soldiers of the cross; therefore, be it

"Resolved, That we recognize in the Rev. Daniel Perrin Bestor, a pioneer of our Baptist denomination, one who was ever loyal and true to the cause of his Master and King; and be it further

"Resolved, That we call upon our people today to match his vision and his devotion to the cause of Jesus Christ and His teachings by sacrificial giving and consecrated service."

whose terms expire: Mrs. T. G. Bush, Mrs. Key Murphree, R. A. Porter, W. M. Hudson, J. W. Bowers, A. A. Hutto.

Trustees Alabama Baptist Hospital — B. W. Pruitt, John A. Fuller, B. B. Finklea, Mrs. John A. Hurt, G. B. Suttles, Mrs. Mary C. Allen, R. A. Rebl, N. C. Floyd.

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